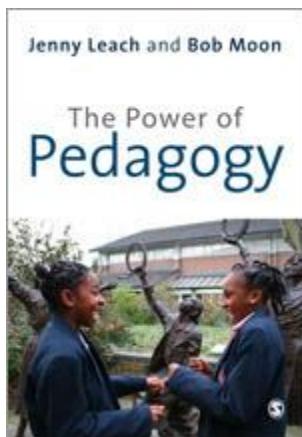


Book Review



The Power of Pedagogy

By Jenny Leach and Bob Moon

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Reviewed by Hui-Teng Hoo

"Pedagogy is to teaching as architecture is to building." (p172). The availability, amount, and properties of the materials that determine the ability to lay a strong foundation and to build a sturdy structure for its inhabitants is allegorical to teaching. How these resources are critically and creatively planned for and used by the architect/teacher will have a different impact on the outcomes of the building/teaching and learning. The aforementioned are dependent on an antecedent, that is, the piece of land the building sits on or where the teaching takes place. There is no meaning without context.

The context the book provides span four continents: Asia, Africa, America, and Europe. The authors offer the interpretation of historical and contemporary ideas from previous centuries to juxtapose with current practices, and make comparisons and contrasts with pedagogy in different settings. The authors illustrate the debates on teaching and learning that extend and expand from the twentieth to the twenty-first century: from smaller stories around individual teachers in the post-totalitarian world of Albania in the 1990s and Eastern Cape teachers in post-apartheid South Africa, to bigger stories involving master figures of pedagogy ideas like Bruner, Dewey, Freire, Gardner, Montessori, and Vygotsky.

The choice of chapter titles is interesting. Each of the eight chapter titles is a single word that embodies the content aptly – "Pedagogy", "Settings", "Minds", "Learning", "Knowledge", "Toolkits", "Identities", and "Pedagogies". In Chapter 1 (Pedagogy), the authors introduce Reggio Emilio – one of the world's most renowned early-years education systems. Reggio Emilio's pedagogy was a source of inspiration to many educationalists, and provides a neat introduction to the focus of this book, "The Power of Pedagogy". Chapter 2 (Settings) or what Lave refers to as 'arena' (p11) is helpful in creating the pedagogic setting with wide ranging factors that influence the process of teaching and learning. Chapter 3 (Minds) brings to bear that pedagogy is more than the accumulation of strategies and techniques; it is the view of the mind. The mind is complex and multi-faceted, and so understanding the mind and cognitive science is vital to teacher knowledge. Chapter 4 (Learning) embraces the importance of participation. Learning is a social process that is brought about by the learner and other factors matter such as teacher, other learners, the environment and the resources. Chapter 5 (Knowledge) links the way the minds make sense of the world through various types of knowledge such as propositional, procedural, impressionistic, self-regulatory, formal and informal knowledge. Chapter 6 (Toolkits) discusses toolkits specific to different purposes and how those aid or inhibit

the learning process. Chapter 7 (Identities) brings the learners' identities to the forefront, asserting that the identity of learners and their self-esteem - or the lack of - can determine or undermine their learning capacity. Chapter 8 (Pedagogies) puts together the earlier discussions on the liberating role of pedagogy. Pedagogies embrace complex factors that influence teaching and learning; a complex mind capable of reflective and reflexive learning; development of knowledge; appropriate toolkits to make sense of the world in which we live; and building identity and self-efficacy of learners, including teachers.

The premise that "good teachers are intellectually curious about pedagogy" (p1) is an indication that this book is relevant to teachers, masters and doctoral students of education undertaking research on issues related to pedagogy in any part of the world. I am a lecturer who works in Singapore and also a doctoral student who is doing my part-time doctoral study in the United Kingdom. The coverage of numerous historical ideas and contemporary practices of education through the use of case studies makes this book very informative and engaging. The discourse on pedagogy ignites the reflection for both teachers and learners to consider the frameworks put forth in the clearly delineated chapter titles alongside the ongoing and evolving professional changes in education.

Yet, what I would wish for in this already well-concocted mixture of contents, is an infusion of more innovative pedagogical practices in the twenty-first century classrooms which draw on historical education ideas like constructivism (Piaget and Dewey), and social constructivism (Vygotsky). Such innovative pedagogical practices could encompass info-communication technology, vis-à-vis the twentieth century industrial prescribed approach of the teacher dispensing information to the learner.

For me, this is a book that can jolt educators and policy makers to rethink taken-for-granted culturally-specific curricula, setting, and identity as well as habitual pedagogical, knowledge, mind sets and practices. The cultural contexts and temporal dimensions throw light on what is pedagogy in the dynamic educational landscape in the way it is – features, functions, and effects.